

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7897

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

C O N F I D E N T I A L KHARTOUM 3289

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SU, PEPR, XF

SUBJ: MEETING WITH SADIQ AL MAHDI

1. I MET WITH POLITICAL LEADER SADIQ AL MAHDI AT MY REQUEST AT HIS HOME THURSDAY EVENING, JULY 20. I OPENED WITH GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE SUDANESE ECONOMIC SITUATION, AS WE SAW IT, AND EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT DEVALUATION HAD BEEN A DIFFICULT BUT ESSENTIAL STEP. I ALSO TOLD HIM THE USG HAD SUGGESTED AN INFORMAL COMMITTEE OF DONORS CHAIRED BY EITHER THE IMF OR THE IBRD AND THAT PRESIDENT NIMEIRI HAD LIKED THE IDEA. SADIQ INDICATED THAT HE, TOO, THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A GOOD THING.

2. SADIQ SAID HE WAS SERIOUSLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE STATE OF THE SUDANESE ECONOMY. HE SAID THE GOVERNMENT HAD DONE A VERY POOR JOB OF EXPLAINING THE REASONS FOR DEVALUATION, WHICH HAD BEEN MORE OF A POLITICAL THAN AN ECONOMIC DECISION. SUDANESE PUBLIC THEREFORE ASSUMED THAT DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN AS A RESULT OF OUTSIDE PRESSURE (SAUDI AND IMF) AND WERE QUITE ANGRY. SADIQ SAID THAT SUDANESE
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COMMUNIST PARTY HAD BECOME TOO WEAK TO MAKE A DIRECT POLITICAL MOVE IN THE SUDAN. BUT THERE WERE TWO DEVELOPMENTS LOOMING UP THAT SUDANESE COMMUNISTS COULD EXPLOIT AND FROM THEM GAIN STRENGTH. THE FIRST WAS A VERY REAL POSSIBILITY OF EXTENSIVE FOOD RIOTS. SUDANESE HAD BORNE INTERMITTENT BUT CONSTANTLY RECURRING SHORTAGES OF BASIC NECESSITIES IN THE MARKET WITH GREAT PATIENCE IN THE PAST.

SADIQ FELT THAT THIS PATIENCE WAS RUNNING THIN AND THERE COULD BE SERIOUS PUBLIC DISORDER. MOREOVER, SADIQ SAID THERE WAS A GROWING UGLINESS IN RELATIONS BETWEEN EMPLOYERS(IN BOTH THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS) AND THEIR EMPLOYEES. SADIQ FORESAW A SERIES OF BITTER, POSSIBLY VIOLENT, STRIKES AHEAD. HERE AGAIN THE COMMUNISTS WOULD TRY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION.

3. WE THEN TURNED TO SUDAN'S FOREIGN RELATIONS. HE SAID HE WAS GLAD THAT NIMEIRI HAD TONED DOWN HIS PUBLIC ATTACKS ON THE SOVIET UNION. SADIQ SAID HE WAS AS ANTI-COMMUNIST AS NIMEIRI BUT HE SIMPLY THOUGHT IT WAS WRONG NEEDLESSLY TO PROVOKE A SUPER POWER.

4. SADIQ ALSO FELT THAT SUDAN SHOULD MAKE A GREATER EFFORT TO IMPROVE ITS RELATIONS WITH MENGISTU GOVERNMENT IN ADDIS ABABA. HE WAS CONVINCED THAT MENGISTU WAS PRIMARILY AN ETHIOPIAN NATIONALIST AND THAT SOVIET IDEOLOGY WOULD NOT TAKE HOLD OF THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE. MANY OF THE ERITREAN INSURGENTS, HOWEVER, WERE COMPLETELY DOCTRINAIRE MARXISTS. SADIQ SAID HE KNEW THAT THEY HAD CLOSE WORKING RELATIONS WITH THE SUDANESE COMMUNISTS. I SAID THAT USG WAS ALSO SEEKING TO IMPROVE OUR RELATIONS WITH ETHIOPIA AND THAT WE HAD JUST SENT AN AMBASSADOR THERE AFTER A TWO YEAR HIATUS. I THEN SAID THAT I REALIZED THAT SADIQ ENJOYED CLOSE TIES WITH THE SAUDI
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ROYAL FAMILY. I SUGGESTED THAT HE MIGHT MAKE HIS VIEWS KNOWN TO THE SAUDIS WHO, I BELIEVED, TENDED TO OVERSIMPLIFY THE SITUATION IN THE HORN.

5. THE CONVERSATION CONCLUDE BY A FAIRLY LENGTHY DISCUSSION OF THE SITUATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. NOTHING OF NOTE EMERGED. I WAS, HOWEVER, IMPRESSED BY THE DEPTH OF SADIQ'S KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE PROBLEMS AND THE FACT THAT HE WAS FULLY UP TO DATE.
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